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ABSTRACT

Based on interviews of 68 key administrators, a survey questionnaire given to 345 principals and districtwide administrators, and a shortened questionnaire given to 177 teachers in 68 New Jersey and Pennsylvania school districts in 1981, this study examines how educators seek assistance to strengthen educational programs and promote change. Answers to research questions suggest: (1) assistance seeking is primarily an administrative task; (2) assistance seeking involves about as many internal contacts as external ones; (3) administrators select about equally from the available assistance agencies; (4) administrators contact specific assistance agencies in different content areas (including administration, organization, and finance; special student groups; and evaluation and needs assessment) about equally; (5) administrators seem generally quite discerning in their searches; and (6) a profile based on six independent variables (including education, experience, and position) suggests that assistance seekers tend to be central office staff. Further research should address such issues as why administrators seek assistance and the role of the district office staff. Two tables provide data on the frequency of assistance seeking and the characteristics of assistance seekers. Two figures show the proportion of assistance contacts by content area and agency. An appendix provides statistics and a correlation matrix for all variables. (PB)

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SHOPPING FOR ASSISTANCE:

A BOUNDARY-SPANNING ROLE FOR ADMINISTRATORS

One of the most important tasks of school administrators is to be a boundary spanner by managing relationships with the school's environment. By working with the school board, the central office, and the community, administrators contribute to educational effectiveness by buffering teachers from hostile elements in the environment (Iannaconne & Lutz, 1970; Morris, Crowson, Hurwitz, & Porter-Gehrie, 1982; Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982). More positively, administrators can improve instruction by finding the sources of assistance that will promote the development of instructional programs. Many principals may agree with a colleague involved in a major change effort who was loath to intervene directly in his teachers' classrooms but who believed that, "In areas a group of teachers is weak in, we should provide some inservice. Maybe not ourselves, but we should know how to get it for them" (Firestone, 1980; p. 65).

This search for assistance is, in fact, an important way by which administrators can strengthen educational programs and promote change. In the wake of the pessimism in the early and mid-1970s about the possibility of implementing change in schools (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975), there is now a growing body of evidence which suggests that constructive changes can be made (Loucks, Cox, Miles, Huberman, & Eisenman, 1983; Louis, Rosenblum, & Molitor, 1981). A key element in the successful change process is external assistance (Louis, 1981). However, these studies have been of voluntary relationships between schools or districts and external agencies, relationships often initiated by school administrators. Little attention has been

given to the recruitment and selection of districts for these programs or to the ways in which school administrators find out about and negotiate their way into such special efforts. To understand more about how effective assistance relationships are established, it is important to know more about whether and how administrators shop for assistance.

This paper begins to explore the assistance-seeking activities of administrators. It is based on survey and interview data from a study of relations between local educators and one kind of assistance agency: the regional educational service agency (RESA), those agencies between the state and local levels of the educational system. It briefly reviews what is known about the boundary spanning work of school administrators and the effectiveness of external assistance for promoting improvement and then describes the study's procedures. The major part of the paper then addresses a series of descriptive questions about how administrators seek assistance.

Technical Assistance, Educational Change and Administrative Tasks

Recent research on educational change suggests that there is reason for considerably more optimism about the potential for constructive change in schools than was the case only a few years ago. However, such change is most likely to take place when local educators receive outside assistance in their change efforts. Moreover, recent studies raise a number of questions about who searches for assistance? from what agencies? and with what skill?

Educational Change and Outside Assistance

Two major studies of recent educational change efforts provide the basis for greater optimism. The first of these is the Research and Development Utilization (RDU) study (Louis, Rosenblum, & Molitor, 1981). In this demonstration project, the National Institute of Education established seven networks whereby national, state and other assistance resources would be made available to local educators. Representatives of this network would take educators through a problem-solving process designed to help them identify, implement, and incorporate research-based products or ideas to improve basic skills or career education instruction. The evaluation of this project examined a variety of outcomes, including the extent to which the problem first identified was solved, the extent of product implementation and incorporation, and such "spin-off" effects as ancillary learning by school staff or other improvements in the school. Half of the participating schools (51%) were considered "mixed-high" successes or better. They incorporated either a research-based product or a systematic problem-solving process and had one substantial positive spin-off effect. Only ten percent of the schools were characterized as failures. The research team attributed successful outcomes to three factors: the amount and quality of external assistance that changing schools received, the quality of the products they adopted, and the process by which they planned for the implementation of innovations.

The second study is a survey of Dissemination Efforts Supporting School Improvement (DESSI). This study examined 146 schools implementing innovations. The innovations had been disseminated to schools through four different strategies: interpersonal linkage (through the National

Diffusion Network), commercial marketing, state administered dissemination, and local development and invention (Loucks, et al., 1983). The researchers were impressed by the amount and durability of the changes that had taken place in these schools and the fidelity with which externally developed innovations were implemented. An important facilitator of effective change outcomes was the use of external assistance. Both regression analyses across the sample of schools and an ethnographic study of 12 schools indicated that external assistance was especially helpful in bringing about major changes.

These studies are not isolated phenomena. Reviewing two decades of research on educational change, Louis (1981, p. 168) concludes that "a relatively long tradition of research supports the importance of external actors in stimulating knowledge use both in schools and in other contexts." Research on a variety of intervention efforts including research dissemination efforts (Sieber, Louis, & Metzger, 1972), program dissemination systems (Emrick, Peterson, & Agarwala-Rogers, 1977), and organization development efforts (Fullan, Miles, & Taylor, 1980) all reinforce the importance of external assistance for educational change.

The Search for Assistance

Given the apparent utility of external assistance, it becomes quite important to learn more about how schools and assistance agencies come together. Most assistance relationships are voluntary, and only some districts become involved in the kinds of change activities described above. Inadequate search procedures can result in missed opportunities for local educators or in affiliation with assistance agencies that are a waste of

time or even destructive. Relatively little attention has been given to how educators develop relationships with assistance agencies. The existing clues are found in studies of school administrators and in "marketing studies" for knowledge bases and innovations.

An extremely useful source of information is the "Mintzberg studies" examining the way administrators use their time. These provide descriptive data that among other things, indicate how much time is spent in contacts with people outside one's organization and who those contacts are with. Several of the studies of principals indicate that these individuals spend from 20 to 30 percent of their time in interactions with people outside their buildings (Hannaway & Sproull, 1978-79; Morris, Crowson, & Porter-Gehrie, 1981; Wolcott, 1973). Generally, superintendents spend even more time dealing with outsiders (Willower, 1982). In one study, six superintendents spent an average of half their time in interaction with people from outside their districts (Pitner & Ogawa, 1981).

How much of this time is spent searching for external assistance is more difficult to determine. Principals spend most of their outside time dealing with their local communities and their central offices. Unless substantial assistance comes from the latter source, it is difficult to know where and when assistance seeking behavior takes place. Pitner & Ogawa (1981) report that their superintendents spend about 17 percent of their time interacting with peers from outside their districts. Such interaction may provide leads about sources for assistance.

Although the time samples in these studies are small, seeking assistance from specialist agencies does not seem to take up a great deal of the time of principals. Superintendents may spend more time at this task, but

the amounts are not great. Still, conclusions must be speculative because these studies did not specifically attend to the search for assistance. Moreover, because these studies are of principals and superintendents, we know even less about the assistance seeking behavior of teachers and central office staff (curriculum coordinators, secondary education supervisors, etc.).

Sheer amount of time may not be the issue, however. For instance, Morris et al. (1981) find their principals quite well informed about new developments in educational practice. Such knowledge comes through professional conferences which may also provide an arena for identifying sources of assistance. More generally, Granovetter (1972) suggests that weak ties--that is, occasional contacts with people not normally in one's special network--are often the most important source of new information and assistance.

Although the time studies provide only limited information, they do help reinforce the developing view that boundary maintenance is an important task for school administrators. Thus, Morris et al. (1982) emphasize how principals protect teachers from unwanted intrusions from both the community and the central office. Bossert et al. (1982) suggest that one way school administrators can make schools more effective is by "buffering" teachers from such external intrusion. There is a long tradition of examining how school superintendents do this same sort of buffering of the school board (Iannaconne & Lutz, 1970; Tucker & Zeigler, 1980).

It should be noted, however, that all of these studies phrase the problem of environmental management negatively. They emphasize boundary maintenance or protection from environmental intrusion rather than boundary

spanning or the search for opportunities. There is another tradition that provides hints that "educational entrepreneurs" (House, 1974) play a key role in scanning the environment to identify innovations to adopt. These entrepreneurs are often highly mobile individuals (Carlson, 1972) who establish interpersonal networks of informal contacts. These contacts are a key link for finding opportunities. However, since this research was done before the networks of assistance agencies that developed in the 1960s and 1970s were fully matured, it is not clear how applicable these findings are to the current search for assistance.

Along with the time studies, a second body of research is the marketing studies. These would be even more useful than the studies of school administrators if they were plentiful. However, they are not. Perhaps the most important of these is the "Educational Market Information Study" conducted through the Far West Laboratory (Hood & Blackwell, 1976; Hood, Mick, & Katter, 1976). This study examined the information sources used by a variety of audiences including school district employees at all levels, but also policy makers and professors. The samples used in this study are quite large (205 teachers, 187 principals, and 329 other staff in the larger study), but the study was intended more to learn about the market for print media and information retrieval services than for technical assistance. Nevertheless, this research highlights a few important points that should apply to the search for assistance. First, the most frequently used knowledge source overall is face-to-face contacts within one's own district. Second, administrators have more purposes for seeking information than teachers; these include policy as well as instructional issues. Finally, district officials in particular are much more likely than

teachers to use face-to-face contacts from outside the district as a source of information. This finding supports House's (1974) contention that teachers are too tied to their own classroom to conduct extensive searches for external assistance. It suggests that if anyone looks for external assistance, it will most likely be central office staff.

One other point concerns the quality of the search for assistance. Although no direct research has been done on this point, the quality of this search should be similar to that for innovations or other research information. Some light on this issue comes from a national survey of high schools to learn what innovations were adopted (Nelson & Sieber, 1976). This study concludes that more expensive innovations are more likely to be adopted than cheaper ones and that there is only a modest relationship between the frequency with which an innovation is adopted and its quality as rated by a national panel of experts. Apparently, the search for innovations to adopt is not extremely effective or rational, and one might expect the same to be true for the search for external assistance. However, this survey was conducted in the late 1960s when considerably less was known about the hows and whys of change than is the case today. There is reason to believe educators have learned a good deal in the interim and are more discerning today (Fullan, 1982).

In sum, existing research offers only fragmentary clues about how local educators search for external assistance. Administrators do not devote a great deal of time to the task although they seem to know their environment fairly well. Superintendents spend more time working with their environments than principals so they may spend more time seeking assistance. Administrators have easier access to the kinds of external

personal networks that might facilitate the search for assistance, and may have a wider range of assistance needs than do teachers. Given the time constraints and the constraints created by reliance on informal networks, there is some reason to believe that educators do not search for external assistance very effectively; but the data are dated and only indirectly applicable. All in all a great deal must still be learned about how educators seek external assistance. After describing the procedures of this study, we provide further information on the search for assistance by addressing the following questions:

1. Is the search for assistance an administrator or a teacher task?
2. To what extent do administrators seek assistance from outside their district?
3. What agencies do administrators turn to for assistance?
4. Do administrators differentiate by content area in their use of specific agencies?
5. How discerning are administrators in their search for assistance?
6. What are the characteristics of administrators who search for assistance?

Study Procedures

To better understand how educators seek external assistance, we used a variety of techniques to collect information about this process. The two most important sources of data reported in this paper are interviews with key school district personnel and surveys of staff across the spectrum of professional responsibilities from teachers to superintendents. The data in this paper were collected as part of a larger effort designed to learn

more about the contributions that external agencies provide in offering assistance to local educators.

The focus of our attention in this study was the local school district administrator. Ideally, in an exploratory study of this nature we would have drawn a purposive sample of administrators who frequently use the services of external assistance agencies. An effective way of selecting that sample is to go to these assistance agencies and solicit nominations. Although we did not have the luxury of tapping multiple kinds of agencies, we were able to use the nominations from one type, the Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs), a prominent source of external assistance for local schools. As part of Research for Better School's service mission to the region we had undertaken a study of RESAs, a growing set of agencies which exist in 39 states and form a tier between the state and local levels. In most states, including those in this study, the primary mission of RESAs is to provide assistance to educators in a variety of areas, including training and technical assistance. The organizations that were part of the two studies of educational change reviewed earlier, RDU and DESSI, make extensive use of RESAs as an important source of delivery of assistance. As a byproduct of the larger RESA study, we are able to explore the issue of assistance with a wide range of external agencies.

In the spring of 1981 we visited 68 separate school districts in the states of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. We interviewed one key administrator from each district and surveyed a sample of teachers, principals, and district-wide administrators. The districts were selected because of their frequent, voluntary use of assistance agencies. This determination was made by asking employees of assistance agencies to nominate school

districts with whom they were in frequent contact.* The sample of administrators was chosen to be as reflective as possible of the region in terms of size, population density, socio-economic status, and geographic location.

Initial contacts in all districts began with the superintendent. He or she helped identify one key district-wide administrator whose primary responsibility was managing relations with the external environment. In four larger districts two such administrators were chosen. This environmental manager became our key informant. These informants included a mix of superintendents (60 percent) and other district staff (40 percent). An in-depth, semistructured interview lasting from one to two hours provided a wealth of data about the variety of assistance seeking activities conducted by the district. The interview included questions about what agencies respondents turn to for training and technical assistance, the reasons for turning to an agency, and the advantages and disadvantages of working with an agency. Respondents were also asked to describe in detail specific incidents or projects in which assistance was received.

Survey data were collected from a sample of respondents in the 68 school districts. The key informant was asked to identify a mix of school-level (principals) and district-wide administrators who made use of external assistance agencies. Administrators were sampled from a range of schools throughout each district with an equal balance of school-level and district-wide administrators. Again, due to the exploratory nature of this

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*Twenty-three RESAs from a population of 52 were canvassed for nominations. These 23 were chosen to reflect diversity in size, geographical location and service reputation (see Firestone, Wilson, & Rossman, 1983).

research we were more interested in surveying educators who made active use of external assistance agencies than we were drawing a random sample. However, we did balance the samples relative to the size of the district. In the smallest districts we surveyed only 3 administrators* while in the larger districts we surveyed up to 16 respondents. We collected data from a total of 345 administrators. In addition, to test for differences between administrators and teachers a shortened version of the questionnaire was given to 177 teachers selected by the key informant for the district.

A major data source was a survey question that asked educators how often they were in contact with various sources for training, technical assistance or information. The six sources included:

- professionals in the district
- neighboring school districts
- professional associations
- RESAs
- colleges/universities
- state department of education

The question was asked for five different content areas: curriculum, administration, special education, evaluation/needs assessment, and mandates and regulations.

This part of the survey provides most of the answers to our six research questions presented above:

1. To learn the extent to which assistance seeking is an administrative task, a comparison of responses of teachers and administrators is presented.

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*Two one-school districts had even fewer administrators.

2. To describe how much administrators seek assistance from outside their district, the frequencies of internal and external contacts are compared and interview data are presented.

3. To find out which agencies administrators use, we present figures for each external source separately.

4. To explore how administrators use specific kinds of agencies, the proportion of contacts by content area are presented for each agency.

5. To learn how discerning administrators are, interview data are presented that show how well administrators evaluate different sources and orchestrate assistance agencies around specific projects.

6. To describe the characteristics of assistance seekers, multiple regression analyses of two dependent variables drawn from the question about assistance provided by different agencies are presented.

Are Administrators the Assistance Seekers?

Our initial question is whether the search for assistance is really an administrative task or something that all educators do. Our expectation was that administrators would seek assistance more than teachers. To examine this expectation, we compared the search activities of teachers and administrators. Although we did not explore the assistance seeking activity of teachers in detail, we did ask them to report on two content areas where they might be expected to look for help: curriculum/instruction and special education. In each content area, both teachers and administrators were asked how often they turned to five external sources of assistance: neighboring school districts, professional associations, RESAs, institutions of higher education, and the state department of education. The choices given included never (coded as zero), once or twice a year (one), three to seven times a year (five), monthly (nine), or weekly

or more (25). For each respondent, the frequency of contacts were summed across all content areas and sources of assistance. The data indicate that administrators seek external assistance almost twice as often as teachers. The mean score for administrators is 30.12 and that for teachers is 17.58. This difference is significant ($t = 6.56$; p .001). It clearly indicates that seeking assistance is primarily an administrative task although it is done by teachers to a lesser extent.

Do Administrators Seek Assistance Externally?

Although it is clear that administrators seek assistance externally more than teachers do, whether much of their assistance seeking activity really takes place outside their district remains a question. To explore administrators' search for assistance, we expanded the content areas to include three in which we did not expect teachers to be involved: administration, management, and finance; evaluation and needs assessment; and state mandates and regulations. In addition to asking administrators how often they turned to external sources of assistance, we also asked how often they sought help from professionals in their own district. The total reported contacts with internal colleagues is 67.21 while that for all external agencies combined is 64.07 (Table 1), indicating that administrators have about as many internal contacts as external ones. When one considers the number of outside agencies that could be contacted, colleagues in one's own district are by far the most frequently selected source of information.

Table 1 about here

The interview data suggest that this pattern of seeking assistance internally reflects a natural tendency to go to colleagues first and to turn outward only for services that cannot be provided within the district:

> We go inside [our] district first. We have the expertise of our Board; they have a lot to contribute. Also our own staff. Then we go to the IU. (IU/2/2)*

> I refer to the IU for services I can't provide. (IU/3/1)

> I turn to them for any activity that I don't have the answer to. (EIC/1/3)

This tendency to use colleagues in the organization also reflects an orientation of internal reliance. That is, a few administrators report little usage of external agencies at all and take pride in their ability to handle matters themselves:

> I don't go to other people that often. I have 19 years of post-secondary education. I go to the EIC sometimes, but most of the time I just do things myself. (EIC/1/4)

> We develop our own resources--don't use outsiders much. (EIC/2/4/)

To What Agencies Do Administrators Turn?

The third question is what agencies do administrators turn to for assistance. If one looks across the whole range of agencies to which administrators can turn, the striking pattern is the tendency to select from all of them about equally (see Table 1). The one exception is colleges and universities. Administrators are in contact with these agencies

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*Interview identifiers can be deciphered as follows: The set of letters refers to the type of agency that identified the respondent's district. IU=Pennsylvania Intermediate Unit. EIC=New Jersey Education Improvement Center. CO=New Jersey County Office. The first number identifies the specific agency. E.g., EIC/2 is the second EIC. The second number refers to the specific district.

just less than half as often as they are with any of the others. The infrequent use of colleges and universities is somewhat surprising considering the attention they often receive. Apparently, while administrators turn to these institutions for preservice education and to obtain credentials, assistance with operational problems comes from quite different agencies.

Do Administrators Differentiate by Content Area?

The fourth question is whether administrators turn to specific agencies for assistance in different content areas. To explore patterns of differentiation, we looked at the proportion of contact with each type in each of our five content areas: administration, organization, and finance; special student groups (primarily special education); evaluation and needs assessment; and state mandates and regulations. With two exceptions, Figure 1 suggests little differentiation among agencies by content of assistance. The modal pattern of assistance seeking across agencies is one of relative equality. Individuals turn to most agencies in almost equal proportion for assistance in each of the five areas. This is an important point for understanding the kinds of assistance received by administrators. Most of the studies indicating that assistance promotes improvement focus on improvement in the area of curriculum and instruction (e.g., Louis et al., 1981; Loucks et al., 1983). In fact, however, administrators seek assistance in a much wider range of content areas.

Figure 1 about here

While the overall pattern is quite clear, there are some exceptions. The major variation from the pattern concerns colleges and universities.

Two-fifths of administrators' interactions with these agencies has to do with curriculum and instruction, almost twice the proportion of interaction on that topic with any other agency. The concentration of university assistance in curriculum helps explain the low overall interaction between these agencies and administrators, but only partially. While most administrator-university contact is about curriculum, this contact is still fairly low--2.33 as opposed to an average of 3.54 for the four other external agencies.

The two other exceptions are rather minor. Administrators' interaction with state departments on the topic of mandates is about a third higher than is their interaction on that topic with any other external agency. This focus stems from the regulatory responsibilities of state agencies. In addition, interaction with RESAs about special education is about a fourth higher than the average interaction on that topic with other agencies. The reasons for this will be discussed below.

Another way to look at the issue of differentiation is to examine the range of percentage of interaction by content area. This is lowest for evaluation (three percentage points) and highest for curriculum and instruction (22 points). However, when one excludes the anomolous case of colleges and universities is excluded, the ranges are much more restricted. The highs include mandates (9 points), administration (8 points), and special education (7 points). None of these is particularly dramatic, reinforcing the interpretation that there is very little differentiation among agencies by content area.

It is possible, however, that this approach underestimates the amount of differentiation among agencies. By asking about different kinds of

agencies rather than specific ones within a type, the question masks possible variation within type. Our questions allow us to examine this possibility within one type of agency--the RESA.

Figure 2 presents data on the interaction by content area for each type of RESA and suggests a good deal of differentiation. Pennsylvania's Intermediate Units have as their primary mission providing instruction to special education and some vocational education students. Assistance for school improvement is a secondary concern that is stressed to the extent that it is a priority for the agency's governing board which represents member districts. Hence, it is not surprising that the plurality of administrator interaction with these agencies is about special student groups. New Jersey's Educational Improvement Centers receive grant and contract funds from the state and federal government to provide training in specific content areas. A good deal of their work consists of inservice programs for teachers and administrators. The instructional focus of the many special programs that support the EICs' efforts suggests a stress on curriculum and instruction. This stress is reflected in administrators' reports where a third of all interaction is in the curriculum and instruction area. Finally, New Jersey's County Offices are branch offices of the state Department of Education which is responsible for administering rather restrictive state education law (Firestone and Wilson, forthcoming). As a result, the largest portion of interaction with these agencies is about mandates and regulations.

Figure 2 about here

Examination of the range of interaction by content area reinforces this picture of greater differentiation among RESAs. The ranges for curriculum and instruction and for special student groups are both 16 points while that for state mandates is ten points. In sum, there seems to be substantial variation among agencies within the broad categories used initially.

How Discerning is the Search for Assistance?

The fifth question responds to the concern raised by the work of Nelson and Sieber (1976) that administrators may not be able to select high quality sources of assistance for their own purposes. This inability could stem from lack of information, ambiguous selection criteria, or excessive loyalty to a single agency. Evidence on this issue comes from the 68 district interviews, so our conclusions probably do not apply to principals. Respondents were asked a number of questions about what agencies they turned to for assistance and why those agencies were chosen.

These interviews suggest that many central office staff have fairly good knowledge of the reputations of specific agencies for providing assistance in different areas although the knowledge of several people may have to be pooled to identify the right agency:

> We usually go outside for TA in response to needs for specific programs. As a large district we have a staff who can do a lot of the initial legwork in identifying exemplary programs....We go to them if we've heard that they've got something promising to offer. (CO/1/1)

That "something promising" may in fact be the skills of one individual:

> When a need for assistance becomes known, central office staff seem to talk it over and pick out an individual at some agency

based on personal knowledge of the track record in the area of need and of how that person will get along with our district. (CO/8/1)

These statements also suggest that the knowledge base for selecting an agency or individual comes from the personal network of the respondent.

These interviews also suggest considerable variation in the ability to select some agencies and in their loyalty to specific sources of assistance. At one extreme are the "shoppers." These individuals have the resources and discrimination to select the most appropriate source of assistance for a given purpose.

> First of all, through grants we work with Jersey City College... Secondly, the EIC. Third, the state office of Equal Educational Opportunity and fourth, the state Bilingual Education Office. These are our prime sources. There are some one-shot places, for instance, the state Historical Society and if we need assistance with T & E forms we go to the state CO monitor. (EIC/1/3)

Some of these shoppers can give a remarkably discriminating list of resources in their area. Thus, two respondents ran down the list of available agencies in the region as follows:

> University of Pittsburgh - proximity, know people on staff, recognized leadership in Department of Ed. Have done work with their Reading Department. Carnegie-Mellon - they have teacher training center; one teacher went there for training. LRDC - secondary; participated in some studies (testing and evaluation, reading)... IU - when we need inservice training, provide resources. We are members of a curriculum council and share what we are doing in field and on school improvement plan. (IU/1/2)

> Rutgers and other local colleges and universities for inservice courses, (for example) management and budget POB; Kane College - family life program...; New Jersey Institute of Technology worked on other programs. Consultants - independents come in to present seminars for principals and teaching center, (for example) MBO.

> Industry, (for example) Prudential Mutual Life gives consultation on management and also gives us space to do inservice; Essex County Office of Planned Parenthood assists with proposals, serve as conduit for funds, getting proposals through. [The] County Office - monitoring, advice on T & E (state law); [they] helped us develop survey for needs assessment [and] also assigned to each of the committees. EIC - the main source for recommending consultants (brokerage) and providing assistance themselves. (EIC/2/2)

Others demonstrate and ability to bring different agencies in and out of the same locally controlled effort over time.

> [We were planning an] Administrative Leadership Training Program. I wrote [the] grant, got it funded, and then asked [the] EIC consultant to do a workshop. He got the program off the ground and took it so far. Then I needed psychologists. I got them from somewhere else. (EIC/1/5)

At the other extreme are the "loyalists" who tend to rely on a single agency. However, their loyalty is relative. It reflects a tendency to go to their favored agency first or for a referral rather than exclusively:

> [I turn] mainly to the IU because I have faith in those people as the best place to get the answer. The second place I go to is the Department of Education. (IU/6/3).

> EIC [is] the first choice always, for a whole gamut of ideas... Only other type of agency we use is the Curriculum Development Center at Glassboro State. (EIC/1/1)

> Primarily [the] EIC. First point of inquiry. If the EIC can't respond, we go to others, often through the EIC reference bank. (EIC/2/1)

Thus, even the loyalists find help from a variety of sources. When they are unable to select among the available agencies themselves, they turn to an agency they know well or that knows them well for assistance. As a result, most are able to be reasonably effective, and some quite discerning, in their search for assistance.

What are the Characteristics of Assistance Seekers?

The final question asks who are the people who seek assistance. However, our initial exploration suggested the need for two separate questions: one about the quantity of assistance sought and another about the location of assistance. The finding that only half of administrator assistance contacts raises the possibility that those who seek a great deal of assistance may not turn to sources from outside their districts. To examine this possibility, two variables were created. The first looked at the amount of assistance seeking by totaling all assistance contacts across all content areas and agencies. The second measured the tendency to seek assistance externally through a ratio of external contacts to all contacts across all content areas. These two variables proved to be uncorrelated ($r = .04$), suggesting that the amount of assistance obtained and the location of assistance are quite different phenomena. Subsequent exploration asked about the characteristics of both those who receive a great deal of assistance and those who receive a large proportion of assistance from outside the district.

Our investigation of this question was largely exploratory because of the dearth of relevant research. To begin we used our discussions with RESA staff and our knowledge of the literature on assistance and educational change to identify six variables that we expected would help determine assistance seeking behavior. Then we used multiple regression techniques to examine the explanatory value of these two sets of variables. This section describes the explanatory variables employed and the results of our analysis.

Independent Variables

Six independent variables were identified (for summary statistics, see Appendix A):

1. Education. The literature on adoption of innovations provides some clues about the role of education: Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) report that early adopters have more education than later adopters; Daft and Becker (1978) find that teacher education contributes to innovativeness in some areas but not others; and Rosenblum and Louis (1981) find that aggregate teacher education is conducive to the implementation of specific innovations. Education was measured as a three category variable (BA/MA/PhD). Generally, we expect those with more education to seek more assistance and to be more externally oriented in their search behavior.

2. Amount of Experience. The evidence on amount of work experience is mixed with some studies indicating that individuals develop their own style or get into a rut after so many years and others suggesting that new workers lack the security to innovate (Corwin, 1975). This variable was operationalized by recording the total years of professional experience in education. It seems likely that there will be either a weak or curvilinear relationship between experience and both indicators of assistance.

3. Position. The role of principals as administrators is largely to promote organizational maintenance rather than to improve instruction (Morris, et al., 1982). Our review of the time studies (see above) suggests superintendents are best positioned to find, consider and use a variety of assistance sources. Two dichotomous dummy variables were created to compare superintendents with all other administrators, and principals with all other administrators. We expect that positions of greater authority will

promote increased overall assistance seeking as well as more intense external search.

4. Location of Experience (Cosmopolitans). Cosmopolitans are defined as individuals who are more committed to their organizational skills and professional groups than to their employing organizations or regions (Gouldner, 1957). They tend to advance by changing jobs (Carlson, 1972). Cosmopolitans are likely to seek out and pass on information about new innovations (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971) and to keep up with news and sources of information from outside their own communities and organizations (Merton, 1968). We operationalized cosmopolitans as those whose work experience was diversified across geographical regions and districts as opposed to being concentrated within a single district. Our expectation is that administrators with more diversified experience backgrounds will be more likely to seek assistance contacts and to look externally for that assistance.

5. Internal Communication. Baldridge and Burnham (1975) and Little (1982) find that more open communication in a district leads to adoption of innovations and school success, respectively. We asked administrators how frequently they talked with colleagues in the district about work-related matters. An index was created by averaging the response for four categories of colleagues. We expect that administrators who communicate the most with others in the district will have more access to others to receive assistance. The relationship to the external ratio is less clear. Increased communication may surface problems that can only be solved from outside. On the other hand, high internal communication may uncover

someone with previously unidentified skills to solve a problem and preclude the need for going outside.

6. Specialization. The administrators we interviewed and surveyed ranged in their training and their responsibilities from being jacks-of-all-trades whose activities included doing a little bit of everything for the school district to very specialized individuals whose sole responsibility was the administration of a particular program (e.g., continuing adult education). We asked respondents to indicate how often they worked in each of five content areas. The responses were combined to form an index of specialization (i.e., those who worked exclusively in one area were defined as specialists while those who allocated equal time across all content areas were generalists). The effect of specialization can be argued both ways. Generalists are the ones who have the least amount of information to assist them in their duties and will be most likely to seek assistance from others, either in total or from external sources. On the other hand, specialists have more need for specific kinds of highly technical information and may only find that by seeking external assistance.

Regression Results

The review of independent variables offers no prior expectations about the order for entry. Consequently, all seven variables (two dummy position variables) were entered into each of the two regression equations at one time. Table 2 reports the results of these calculations.

Table 2 about here

The overall contribution of the seven independent variables to an understanding of total assistance seeking is substantial with a multiple correlation coefficient of .53. When one analyzes the contribution of each independent variable, controlling for the effects of the others, three significant contributors are found. These are indicated by the relative size of the Betas, or standardized regression coefficients. Three variables have an equally strong impact on total assistance seeking: position, internal communication, and specialization. It is clear that a significant distinction exists between building-level administrators (i.e., principals) and those that have district-wide responsibilities. The centrality of organizational maintenance (Morris et al., 1982) may mean that little opportunity exists for the principal to seek contacts for assistance. For many principals the role may be quite isolating. On the other hand, the of the district administrator's work seems to require more extensive contacts with others. These data suggest that it is not so important where one is located within the central office hierarchy (i.e., superintendents do not seek assistance more than others) but whether one is there or dealing with issues at the school level.

Those who communicate more with their colleagues in the district about work-related matters also seek more assistance. The causal direction of this relationship is questionable; it is something these analyses are unable to untangle. It is equally plausible to expect that a certain level of assistance contacts causes one to feed back these results to colleagues within the district as it is to expect frequent communication to lead to assistance seeking.

The third significant contribution to total assistance seeking was the specialization variable. The negative Beta coefficient for specialization indicates that generalist administrators are more inclined to seek assistance.

The results for the second equation, ratio of external assistance seeking to the total, provides much less predictive power. Although the combined contribution of the seven independent variables is statistically significant, the variance explained is minimal. The only significant Beta coefficient is for position, where principals are less likely to seek external assistance. Given the hectic pace of dealing with hundreds of daily mini-crises (Wolcott, 1973; Martin & Willower, 1981), it is not surprising to find that principals have little opportunity to seek external assistance. Although the bivariate relationship between specialization and ratio of external assistance is also significant, that disappears when one controls for the other independent variables.

In sum, the evidence helps us understand the characteristics of those who seek a great deal of assistance. Three of the seven variables make a significant contribution. On the other hand, the variables chosen offer little assistance in understanding the ratio of external assistance. It appears that the position structure and individual background variables measured in this study are of little utility in learning more about this phenomenon.

Summary and Implications

This exploration of the assistance seeking behavior of administrators reinforces the importance of that activity for the management of education.

Interest in this topic was spurred by the findings that such assistance is crucial for the effective improvement of instructional programs. Yet, our research indicates that administrators not only seek assistance on matters related to curriculum and instruction, but also on administrative concerns and questions of how to respond to legal mandates, how to treat special student groups, and how to evaluate programs. Assistance is sought in all of these areas about equally, indicating the broad range of areas where administrators benefit from external help.

Seeking assistance in general and seeking it from outside the district are two different matters, however. The most frequent source of assistance for administrators is colleagues within one's district. Apparently, help is sought externally only after internal avenues have been exhausted, a reasonable and cost-effective approach to seeking assistance. Those who are in frequent contact with others for assistance and new knowledge on many topics may or may not seek such assistance externally; there is no correlation between amount of assistance seeking and the location of the source.

The environment from which administrators seek assistance is varied, and somewhat surprising. Both the volume of contact with colleges and universities and the range of content are more limited than might be expected given the prominent role of these institutions in preservice training and the visibility of professorial consulting. A variety of other agencies--including state departments of education, professional associations, and RESAs--provide more assistance across a broader range of topics. Yet, none stands out as the key source on which administrators rely. Instead, administrators seem to shop among a variety of sources and select the ones that

have the reputation for providing effective service on the issue of interest.

Who are the assistance seekers? They tend to be central office staff more than principals, and principals more than teachers. Within the central office, however, superintendents do not seek assistance more than those in a variety of other staff positions. Moreover, some of these central office people--the entrepreneurs--have substantial knowledge of what is available outside the district and a refined ability to orchestrate those sources around particular improvement efforts. Assistance seekers tend also to be generalists who look for help from colleagues with more specialized knowledge. They are also in frequent contact with others inside their districts suggesting that giving and receiving knowledge is a frequent part of their work.

This first exploration of assistance seeking paints a broad picture of what administrators do, but it raises at least four issues for further research. First, more needs to be known about why administrators seek assistance from outside their districts. Our data suggest only that looking externally is a function of position. It may be that principals go outside their districts less because they view the central office as part of their environment or because the central office staff have more time and resources, and a stronger mandate to carry out an external search. Whatever the effect of position, it is clear that we have not yet identified the most powerful variables. These may be characteristics of the district, of the existing knowledge base of the administrator, or of the tasks she or he faces. Very different research designs will be needed to explore these possibilities.

Second, our findings draw attention to the importance of district office staff. Current research on effective schools stresses the crucial role of the principal in creating successful educational institutions (Edmonds, 1979; Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980). However, there is another body of research which suggests that instructional programs will improve more when principals are supported and encouraged from the district level (Rosenblum and Louis, 1981; Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1982; Berman & McLaughlin, 1979). This study shows another role for the central office--identifying and organizing external resources for assistance efforts. While there have been some studies of how superintendents contribute to this process (Carlson, 1972), more needs to be known about the activities of the full range of district office staff and about how they contribute to the effectiveness of instruction.

Third, this study raises questions about administrators' sources of knowledge about external assistance. Why do some people seem to be so well informed and others not? One explanation has to do with the personal network of the individual. That explanation by itself, however, is only partially satisfying because of the marked differences among positions in assistance seeking behavior which suggests positional differences in knowledge. Another possibility has to do with the marketing and outreach strategies of the various agencies that provide assistance to local educators. This line of inquiry is more promising for future reform. If some agencies have more effective approaches, knowledge of those approaches can be used to design better policies to improve education.

Finally, our work suggests a need for a more balanced view of the environment of educational organizations. It is true as Morris et al. (1982)

suggest that any school or district's environment is filled with threats and disruptive forces from which the instructional process must be buffered. However, the environment can also be a source of resources and opportunities, not the least of which are opportunities for useful technical assistance. It seems likely that the balance of threats and opportunities will vary over time. It will change with fluctuations in the economy, political support for education, and the size of the school aged population, among other things. We need to know more about how these factors affect the environment for schooling and about how that environment affects schools and districts both positively and negatively.

Table 1

Frequency of Assistance Seeking from Different Agencies[1] (N=345)

Agency	Mean Frequency
1. Colleagues in Your District (Internal)	67.21
2. RESA	18.22
3. Professional Association	14.70
4. Neighboring Districts	13.48
5. State Department of Education	12.30
6. Colleges and Universities	5.37
Subtotal for all External Sources	64.07

[1] Never=0, once or twice a year=1, three to seven times a year=5, monthly=9, weekly or more=25. Responses for five content areas are summed.

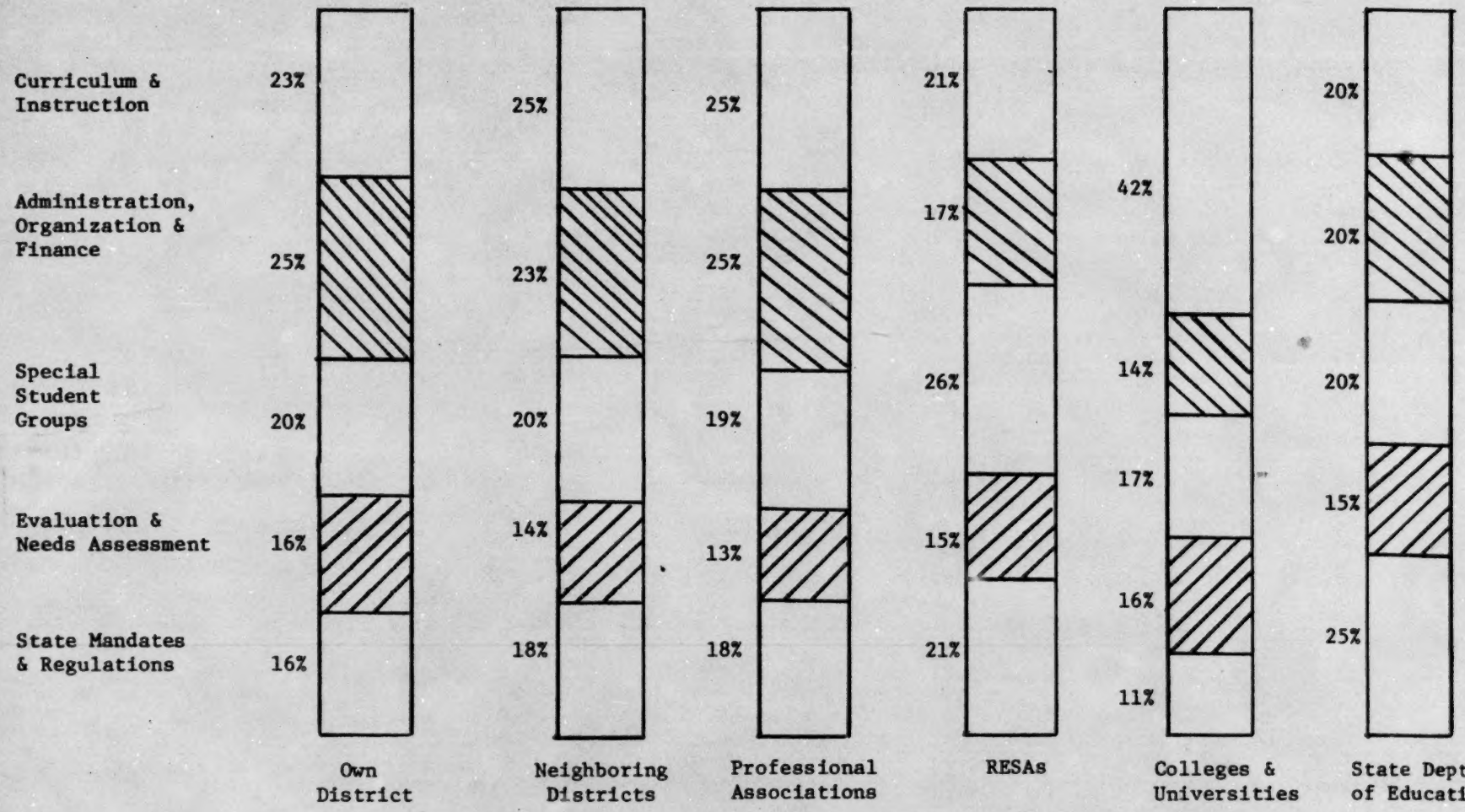

Figure 1. Proportion of Assistance Contacts by Content Area and Agency

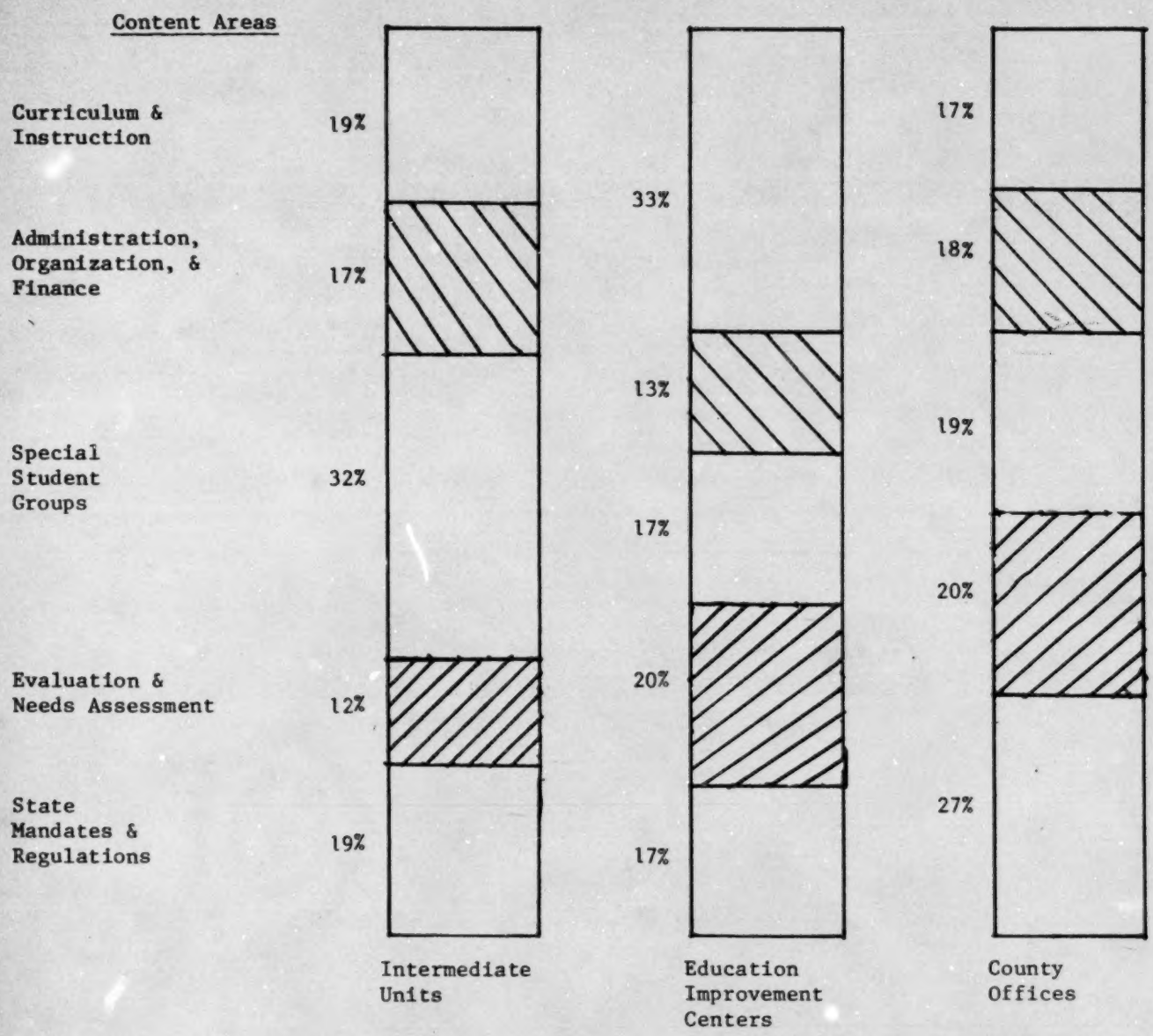

Figure 2. Proportion of Contacts per Content Area by Type of RESA

Table 2

Summary Statistics for Multiple Regression Analysis (N=345)

	Total Assistance		External Ratio	
Independent Variables	r	Beta	r	Beta
Position 1 (Supt. vs Others)	.236***	.113	.090	.025
Position 2 (Prin vs Others)	-.316***	-2.94***	-.184***	-.163*
Amount of Experience	.043	.010	-.074	-.079
Location of Experience	-.040	.071	-.084	-.073
Internal Communication	.366***	.243***	-.045	-.067
Degree	.256***	.096	.038	.023
Specialization	-.275***	-.248***	.140**	.087
Total Equation	R^2 = .283 F = 16.06***		R^2 = .035 F = 2.38*	

* :p < .05
*** :p < .001

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APPENDIX A

Table A-1:

Descriptive Statistics for All Variables (N=345)

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Independent		
1. Position (0=Principal; 1=District Administrator)	0.54	0.50
2. Years of Experience	22.59	8.31
3. Location of Experience	0.57	0.60
4. District Communication	4.84	1.19
5. Degree (1=BA; 2=MA; 3=PhD)	2.16	0.57
6. Specialization	0.31	0.11
Dependent		
7. Total Contacts	133.61	70.63
8. Ratio of External to Total Contacts	0.49	0.19

Table A-2:

Correlation Matrix of All Variables

Variables[a]	1[b]	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	-							
2	02	-						
3	-07	04	-					
4	12*	-03	-15*	-				
5	09*	05	-28*	23*	-			
6	26*	-08	03	-28*	-22*	-		
7	32*	04	-07	35*	25*	-26*	-	
8	22*	-02	-11*	-03	04	17*	04	-

* $p < .05$

[a]Variable names are given in Table A-1.

[b]Coefficients are multiplied by 100.